

Daily Mail COMMENT

The growing threat of pollution

THE scores of dead seals being washed up daily on the North Norfolk coast have dramatically drawn public attention to fears that the seal population of Europe could soon be extinct. The Government, following the Daily Mail's exposure of this dire threat to many of the species, has announced a major research project into the blight afflicting them. That is very commendable. But though we must wait for its conclusions there must, on the basis of what we already know, be a strong presumption that the prime factor behind this tragedy is pollution.

That, after all, should not surprise anyone. After releasing increasing quantities of toxic chemicals, not to mention untreated sewage, into the North Sea, marine life was bound to suffer sooner or later. This is not merely a matter of sentimental concern to nature freaks or animal lovers. For the damage cannot fail to be visited on us humans directly as the poisons and deadly viruses enter the food chain and accumulate in the tissue of the fish we eat.

This is only one of the environmental hazards at present coming to the fore. There is justifiable concern about the growing hole in the ozone layer which shields us from the sun's deadly ultra-violet rays. The destruction of the ozone is blamed, among other things, on the widespread use of aerosols.

Again the burning of fossil fuels combined with the erosion of the tropical rain forests, is also, it is claimed, producing a greenhouse effect affecting the whole of Planet Earth. It already appears to be raising the temperature of the atmosphere and changing the climate for the worse while posing the threat in the longer term of melting the ice caps and bringing the most disastrous floods since the time of Noah.

The possibility of these and other environmental catastrophes was much publicised 20 years ago. Unfortunately the entirely reasonable case for taking care of our world and its natural resources was discredited by the extravagant and often ridiculous claims of the then environmental lobby. For instance, leading members of it confidently predicted a terrible shortage of energy and food, whereas in due course there was a large glut of both. There is now a more mature and thoughtful understanding of dangers to the natural order, especially with regard to carelessness in the disposal of our industrial waste.

And concern is more widespread. As the Prince of Wales has pointed out, the combined membership of environmental organisations in Britain is three million — more than that of all the political parties put together. There is more anxiety about the countryside where today more and more people are going to live.

The environment is thus emerging as one of the most momentous political issues of our time. The Daily Mail intends to return to the subject frequently, pursuing a vigorous and unrelenting campaign for policies by which it will be improved. We see that as our duty to future generations. For the way we treat our environment will determine whether we bequeath our children a better country, indeed a better world, or one damaged beyond repair.

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